



**Hearcel F. Craig**

Senate Asst. Minority Whip  
15th Senate District

**Ohio Senate**

Senate Building  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, Ohio 43215  
Phone (614) 466-5131  
Fax (614) 466-8261  
Craig@ohiosenate.gov

**Committees:**

Insurance  
*Ranking Minority Member*  
Government Oversight and Reform  
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Rules and Reference

**Senate Health Committee**

**S.C.R. 4 Sponsor Testimony**

**Senator Hearcel F. Craig**

**November 30, 2022**

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today on Senate Concurrent Resolution 4. This piece of bipartisan legislation would declare racism a public health crisis and ask the Governor to establish a working group to promote racial equity in Ohio.

This resolution re-introduces legislation from the 133<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly that received bipartisan support and proponent testimony from over 200 interest groups across the state, including labor activists; health care professionals in mental health, children’s health, and women’s health; legal advocates; students from across the state; the mayor of Akron; the Cleveland NAACP; and members of various local governments across the state.

In 2020, Governor DeWine himself [said](#), “Racism is a public health crisis and this is something that we have to work on every day.”

This problem requires attention from every level of government. In Ohio, 32 city and county governments, boards of health, and mayors have officially declared racism a public health crisis.

Racism can impact all aspects of people's lives, including health and mental health; employment and financial security; incarceration; education; and access to safe and affordable housing.

The Health Policy Institute of Ohio [found that](#) policies, practices and beliefs rooted in racism can cause trauma and stress for people of color, leading to health issues such as high blood pressure, stroke, depression or early death. [On average](#), Black Ohioans are expected to live almost five years less than white Ohioans, and Black infants are dying at a rate 2.5 times greater than white infants. COVID-19 also unveiled substantial racial disparities in health care as Black Ohioans were [far more likely](#) to be hospitalized or die from COVID-19.

The pandemic exacerbated existing racial disparities in employment as well. In November of 2020, Black Ohioans were [more than three times as likely](#) to be unemployed and looking for work than white Ohioans.

Our criminal justice system disproportionately impacts Ohioans of color. Black residents in Ohio are incarcerated at [6 times](#) the rate of white residents with sentences that are 19% longer. While Black people make up 13% of [Ohio's population](#), they make up 34% of people in our jails and 45% of people in our prisons.

Our students and schools are also experiencing dramatic racial disparities. Black students are twice as likely to receive a failing grade and three times as likely to be suspended. [Ohio schools](#) suspend a higher share of black students than schools nationally, a worse disparity than in the majority of states.

[Decades](#) of discriminatory housing policies and practices have led to a racial gap in home ownership of [37%](#) in Ohio – 9% higher than the national average. We are failing our citizens.

As our state continues to grow and garner economic development, we need to ensure that all Ohioans have access to equal opportunities and fairness. Eight other state legislatures, including Virginia, Minnesota, Connecticut and Vermont have already declared racism a public health crisis. Acknowledging

the impacts of systemic racism on all members of our society is just the first step. By declaring racism as a public health crisis in Ohio, we can take this critical step toward implementing policies and practices that will create a more equitable and just Ohio.

I want to take a moment to thank Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee for the opportunity to consider this resolution. I welcome any questions you may have at this time.